

This chapter defines the City's role in educating the community, both through participation in the community's opportunities for formal schooling for both its young people and adults, and through the articulation and development of a stronger community culture via the arts.

History

Public education has been a significant part of Gunnison's history since its earliest days. Prior to the school consolidation movement of the 1950s and 60s, the City constituted Gunnison County School District One—one of 30 small districts in the County in the boom days of the 1880s (some of which districts disappeared almost as soon as they were created).

The City's oldest remaining public school is the small brick building in West Gunnison at Eighth Street and Tomichi Avenue, dated 1881, which probably replaced an earlier, cruder building built by Sylvester Richardson's Town Company in 1877. By 1885 (and the collapse of the mining boom) Gunnison had three handsome two-story brick buildings: the first on Pine Street where the County Services building now stands, another in "East Town" where Western State College's Chipeta Hall now stands, and the third in "West Town" at Twelfth Street and Ohio Ave.



In 1911 the Colorado Normal School opened in the north wing of present-day Taylor Hall. The two-year normal school grew, and in 1923 became Western State College of Colorado, a full-fledged four-year college of the liberal arts.

Gunnison's old brick schools were showing their age, and in the 1920s District One built the yellow-brick Blackstock Building that became the City's main Elementary School. It was eventually supplemented by the O'Leary School in 1954 and Lake School on North Boulevard in 1963.



In 1960, all the valley's districts were joined into the Gunnison Watershed District RE1-J. With all the Gunnison schools bursting at the seams already, and pulling in students from other parts of the valley, the current High School was built in 1963, and the Ruland School became a Middle School, taking pressure off of Blackstock.

The latest chapter in Gunnison school history was completed with the passage in 1995 of a \$21 million dollar bond issue, to build the big new Community School for K-8 education on 11th Street north of the Gunnison High School, as well as a new K-12 school in Crested Butte.

The arts have not been such a central and steady part of Gunnison public life throughout the community's history. An early photo shows an "Art Gallery" on South Main Street (close to the current Arts Center). There was an "Opera House" on Boulevard Street, but there is little knowledge about any operas, or anything, being done there. Art remained an erratic influence in Gunnison's public life, and was usually "brought in" from the larger world. A group of college and community people began putting on regular productions under the aegis of "Webster Players," named for the community building where they did most of their shows.

In the mid-1980s the Gunnison Arts Council began a concerted and sustained effort to convert the historic stone building on the southeast corner of Tomichi Avenue and Main St. into a community Arts Center. The purchase, renovation and expansion of the building took more than a million dollars and a decade, but since the first theater productions there in the late 1980s, it has truly become a cultural center for the Upper Gunnison valley. The Center now holds summer art classes for young people; a pottery workshop has several dozen potters developing their skills; and the dance program brings together more than 300 children and adults in a wide range of classes.



At about the same time, the City began to invest in public art through the "SculpTour" project, each year purchasing several pieces of sculpture from a regional traveling exhibit, including some from local sculptors. Another group of citizens, working under the umbrella of the Gunnison Arts Council, has begun a mural project to add interest as well as beauty to some of the blank walls in the community.

A spirit of educational and cultural investment has carried through the years in Gunnison, and continues today.

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS, POLICIES AND ACTION ITEMS

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS

The City works collaboratively with a strong K-12 public school system, with Western State College of Colorado, and with various other county and non-government organizations like the Gunnison Arts Council or the County Literacy Program, to develop an informed and aware community educated to meet the needs of this or any other community for responsible workers and knowledgeable active citizens. The City in turn gains from this collaboration of new inhabitants capable of providing most of the workforce needed to keep the local economy healthy, with a minimum of “leakage” to outside contractors and businesses.

The importance of excellence in our educational system is recognized by the City for quality of life and economic vitality in the community. The City also recognizes that a thriving arts community is valuable to our cultural enrichment and economic health. The City will continue to support education, arts and literacy efforts as a means to improve the standard of living for all Gunnison residents. The City is dedicated to work with all public and private entities to maintain one of the highest literacy rates in the State of Colorado for all residents in the Gunnison Valley with abundant educational opportunities for students of all ages.

POLICIES AND ACTION ITEMS

Education Policies

POLICY 1: COMMUNITY INTERACTION

Support efforts by educational institutions to achieve communication and interaction among educational and governmental institutions and the community. Action items to implement this policy include:

1. Support the REIJ and Coordinate with REIJ with in kind services, materials, and grant support.
2. Design websites among all public entities that provide website links to each other.

3. Continue to actively participate and take a leading role where possible in the Major/Managers meetings.
4. Continue to support the Gunnison Valley Leadership Program by providing City representation on the GVLV Board.

POLICY 2: ENHANCE QUALITY PROGRAMS

Support efforts of educational institutions to enhance the quality of its programs, the qualifications of its faculty, and the academic preparation of its students. Actions to include:

1. Support high quality programs at WSC that can grow into graduate programs.
2. Support WSC in their efforts for recruiting & retaining students.
3. Continue outreach efforts by City staff on WSC campus.
4. Support and help to coordinate with the RE1J School District to implement its strategic plans.

POLICY 3: FOSTER STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

Help foster relationships with students and the community. Actions to include:

1. Take an active role in supporting "hands on" learning by providing staff resources for mentoring programs and government internships.
2. Support Main Street businesses that attract students.
3. Continue to support Youth City Council, the Youth Challenge Grant program, and the El Pomar Youth in Community Service Grant program.
4. Actively participate in the Civics component of the new curriculum for RE1J.

POLICY 4: INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

Support infrastructure improvements and facility expansion of educational facilities. Actions to include:

1. Encourage the expansion of facilities to meet the needs of the community.
2. Provide input for requests for proposals, when possible.
3. Provide input during facilities master plan updates that are commensurate with the City's master plan and goals.

4. Where possible, share in construction mobilization costs for simultaneous projects.

POLICY 5: ENCOURAGE THE ARTS

Provide support to other community entities that offer art, education and literacy programs. Actions to include:

1. Continue to work with the Arts Center and support other funding mechanisms for the "SculpTour" program.
2. Continue to support the Pioneer Museum with in-kind donations.
3. Support the Immigration Integration Committee and efforts to expand multi-cultural programs.
4. Encourage events at the Gunnison Valley Observatory that will enhance scientific education for locals and tourists.

Policies Related to Other Plan Chapters

Housing

Work collaboratively with WSC and other entities to develop quality affordable housing for faculty, staff and students.

Public Safety

Work with college administration to ensure a safe campus.

Continue outreach sessions on campus for renters' rights and safe living practices.

Economic Viability

Recognize the value in education which enriches the quality of life in our community which increases economic development.

Pursue and support heritage programs which are desirable for tourists (e.g., retiring baby boomers).

Land Use

Work cooperatively with college officials in the review of land use decisions that may affect the college.

Transportation

Support transportation links between the schools and the commercial districts that will increase vibrant economic exchange.

Parks, Recreation & Open Space

Encourage organizations to utilize the City-owned Van Tuyl Ranch property for scientific and education programs.

Community Character & Design

Engage in public educational opportunities, such as historic preservation plaques and community walking tours for murals, sculptures and places of cultural or historical significance.

Continue to support public and private enterprises including child-care operations and adult literacy programs.